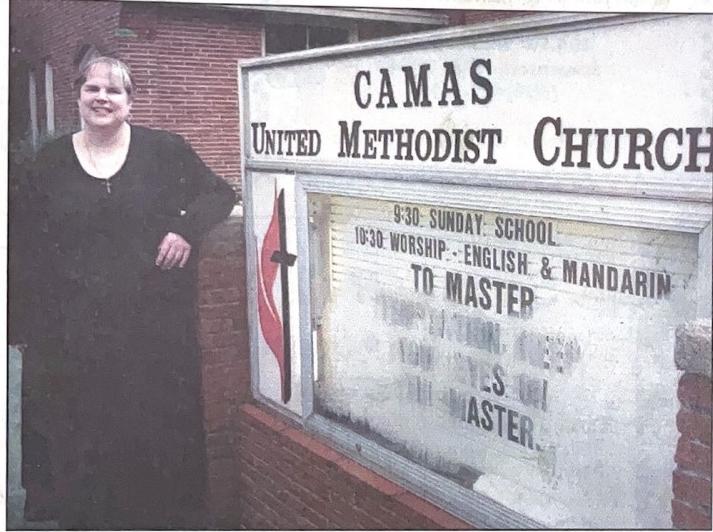


Camas church welcomes first ever female pastor



CLARICE KEATING/POST-RECORD

Lindsy Ireland, a United Methodist church elder, takes over the position that was previously held by Larry Spaur, who was with the church for 10 years, but moved to Sunnyside, Wash., to be closer to family.

"People in Camas have treated me with exceptional kindness. This has been the warmest welcome to a church I've ever encountered."

— Lindsy Ireland,
new pastor at
Camas United Methodist Church

By Clarice Keating
Post-Record staff

Try as one might, there's no escaping the future.

"If God wants you, you will not get away," were prophetic words said to Lindsy Ireland by her pastor in 1968. He said she should consider becoming a deaconess. She said "no way."

But today Ireland, 54, is Camas United Methodist Church's first ever female pastor.

She replaces Larry Spaur, who was with the church for 10 years, but moved to Sunnyside, Wash., to be closer to family.

Currently Ireland is adjusting to life in Camas. Having arrived in July, she has still had little time to unpack. She finishes the task slowly, battling one box at a time.

"The parsonage looks like an archeological dig," Ireland said. "I still can't cook; I can't get to my stove."

Ireland grew up in Ballard, located just outside Seattle.

"We used to say it's a suburb of Norway by way of Minnesota," she said.

Her father was a newscaster, one of the pioneers of radio and television. Her mother was a children's librarian. They were each other's opposite: he, the romantic, philosophical type; she, the pragmatic, hard-headed type.

"My mother gave me my grit, and my father gave me my sense of humor and

romanticism," Ireland said. She has one sister who lives in Arkansas.

"I was always involved in church in junior high, but I never wanted to be a pastor," Ireland said. She had other plans.

First she got a bachelor's degree in psychology at Washington State University, went into the Peace Corps in Korea, got married and got divorced.

But, as it sometimes happens, her life turned out to be a series of awakenings — eventually leading her to seminary at the age of 37.

"I finally went to seminary to take a couple of classes," she said. "It was just a summer thing as far as I was concerned."

But two classes led to four; four to six; and by 1987 Ireland was enrolled in Claremont School of Theology's master's of divinity program.

"God had picked up the proverbial two-by-four and hit me on the head," Ireland said.

The church congregation hosted a potluck for Ireland last week. Someone asked her to tell a bit about herself.

She ended up doing a 45-minute comedy routine.

"I once had an 8-year-old kid come up to me and say 'you're not like other people at the church,'" Ireland said. "I asked 'why not?' He sat and thought very seriously and finally said, 'You have more fun.'"

Ireland wonders what that

says about the church institution.

But she tries her best to stay lighthearted. Even her arrival in Camas was overshadowed by the fact that her sweetheart passed away just days before they were to announce their engagement.

"People in Camas have treated me with exceptional kindness," Ireland said. "This has been the warmest welcome to a church I've ever encountered."

She has been pleasantly surprised by the congregation's willingness toward change.

"These days, if you want your church to thrive, you have to be willing to change," Ireland said. "I was just telling the youth pastor the other day that you can't keep the kids these days with Bach or Brahms."

This flexibility is apparent on Sundays, when two sermons are given, one upstairs in English to about 60 community members, and one downstairs in Mandarin Chinese, for 40 or 50 more community members.

Ireland said she would like to see a 30- to 40-percent rise in the congregation's regular attendance, and she hopes to see the youth group take off and thrive.

"I don't think anyone in this congregation would say they don't want the church to grow," she said.

In the near future, Ireland will concentrate on getting adjusted and unpacked and maybe trying to find her stove to make a home-cooked meal.